Revolutionary politics and thought

Chris Cutrone, Dimitrio Roussopoulos, Samir Gandesha, Nikos Malliaris, and Joseph Schwartz

"No coarser insult, no baser defamation, can be thrown against the workers than the remark, 'Theoretical controversies are for the intellectuals'"

— Rosa Luxemburg, Reform or Revolution (1900)

Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement the only choice is—either bourgeois or socialist ideology... This does not mean, of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology. They take part, however, not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians, as Proudhons and Weitlings; in other words, they take part only when they are able, and to the extent that they are able, more or less, to acquire the knowledge of their age and develop that knowledge."

— Vladimir Lenin, What is to be Done? (1905)

"The liquidation of theory by dogmatization and thought taboos contributed to the bad practice."

— Adorno, Negative Dialectics (1966)

In the 1840s Karl Marx wrote that social revolution would involve "carrying out the thoughts of the past," in which "humanity begins no new work but consciously completes the old work". The role of revolutionary thought for Marx, in other words, involved drawing attention to how past revolutionary tasks were failing to be worked through in present political practice; of understanding the reasons why theory and practice had changed and, in turn, how this understanding could be advanced towards the (present) completion of the (old) revolution.

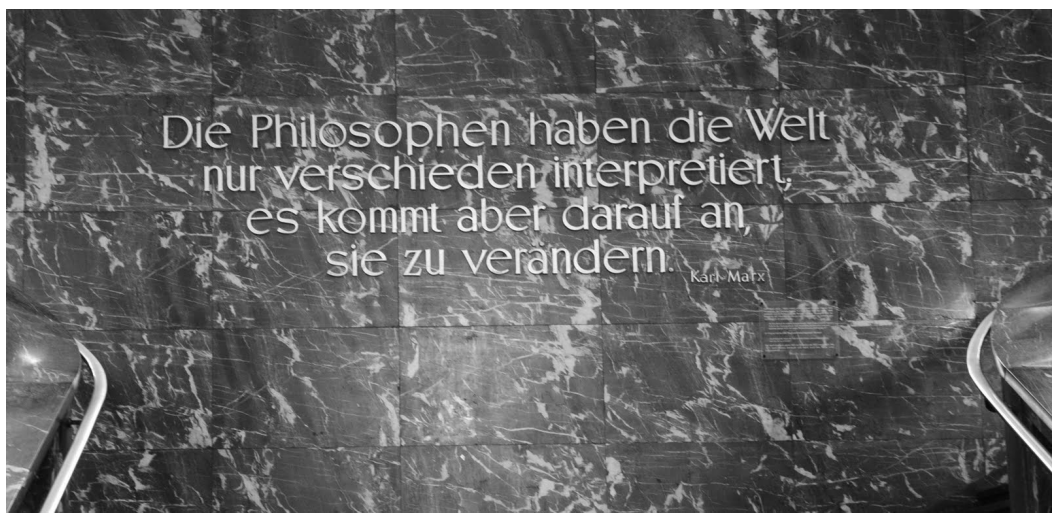
Later, for Lenin and Luxemburg, political disputes in the Second International revolved around the failings of revolutionary practice. Luxemburg and Lenin seemed optimistic about revolutionary thought being carried out by the practices of mass political movements for socialism. They assumed that workers could act as "socialist theoreticians" while participating in revolutionary politics.

In the 1960s, figures like C. Wright Mills retrospectively assessed the emergence of the intelligentsia as "distinct and historically specific," locating the political role of figures such as Lenin and Luxemburg as a phenomenon of the development of modern society. But Mills was wistful: he recognized that political-intellectual figures like Luxemburg and Lenin were missing in his time. What does the current role of intellectuals say about the historical disappearance of the kind of political possibilities Mills had in mind?

While the separation of revolutionary thinking and politics might seem more distinct in the present, with "theory" being relegated to universities, and "practice" to social movements, it seems increasingly common for academic work motivated from the Left to blur the boundary between theory and social movements. While this state of affairs may seem to approach the sentiment articulated by Luxemburg, that there be nothing separating theoretical issues from the people struggling to overcome their condition, it does so without the emergence of corresponding political practices that would transcend the present. Alternatively, other currents of theory, among both independent intellectuals and organized political tendencies, seem completely severed from everyday social practice and so harmless as subcultural activities. Theory today seems to either assert the primacy of practice, leaving no recourse but to take up practical discontents as inalienable in thinking, or is so entirely cut off from practical concerns that it seems sustainable only in the academy. Revolutionary thinking, no less than revolutionary practice, seems hard to locate in the present.

This discussion will reflect on the relationship between revolutionary politics and thinking in the past and present and ask why has it become increasingly difficult to render political life *intellectual* and intellectual life *political* today? Panelists will consider the historical role of revolutionary theory as a moment of revolutionary politics, and the ways in which thinking can be held responsible for politics, and politics held responsible for thinking.

On April 5th, 2014, at the Sixth Annual Platypus International Convention at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Platypus hosted a panel discussion with Chris Cutrone (Platypus), Samir Gandesha (Simon Fraser University), Nikos Malliaris (Lieux Communs), Dimitrios Roussopoulos (Transnational Institute of Social Ecology), and Joseph Schwartz (Temple University). This discussion reflected on the relationship between revolutionary politics and thinking in the past and present, and asked why has it become increasingly difficult to render political life intellectual and intellectual life political today.



Marx's famous statement concluding his 1845 Theses on Feuerbach is engraved in the entryway of Humboldt University, Berlin.

The event's description as well as the questions to the panelists can be found here. What follows is an edited transcript of the discussion.

Opening Remarks:

Nikos Malliaris: In my opinion, the major political issue of our times, that which constitutes at the same time the goal of all emancipatory or revolutionary politics, is the following: How can we exit consumer society? How can we exit this type of society that is based on productivism and technophilia, with cultural liberalism as its official ideology? It is precisely this type of society that forms the culmination of capitalism, and more broadly, of western modernity itself.

I am deliberately using the term "exit," instead of a more classical term such as "overthrow," because I believe that this type of understanding and analyzing contemporary social conditions and political priorities determines the way we conceive of revolutionary politics today. Moreover, a radical critique of contemporary society should be at the same time political and cultural, since the problem is not simply socio-economic, but deeply anthropological. In other words, it affects the very way people interiorize and invest in institutions and social representation, the very way contemporary societies are being formed and reproduced. For the first time in the history of emancipatory and revolutionary movements, what we face as a political task is not any more just the overthrowing of an exploitative or oppressive society, but the very reinvention of Society as such, with a capital "S." We have to deal with something more than the problem of exploitation or oppression: the vaster and deeper problem of social and cultural decadence. Not only natural ecosystems have suffered terrible degradation after 200 years of industrial and technological progress, and economic growth. Both society itself, as a form of meaningful human coexistence, as well as the human being as a creative and imaginative creature, have been degraded at such a scale that the contemporary world seems to be an endless process of dislocation and disintegration on all levels.

People cannot find any meaning other than ferocious consumption, whether of merchandise, services, or experiences. Society seems less and less capable of imposing minor forms of limitations to these excesses of the contemporary individual. Nor can it set any to the frenetic course of technology and economy, both of which have become separated from society, raising their expansion to an end in itself. What we need is an unprecedented social transformation, which will by far exceed the simple redistribution of wealth and its concomitant modification of modes of production. Without a profound transformation of human values, social representations, and collective beliefs, no real progress can

"Revolutionary politics and thought" continues on page 2

69

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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines
Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: *review_editor@platypus1917.org*. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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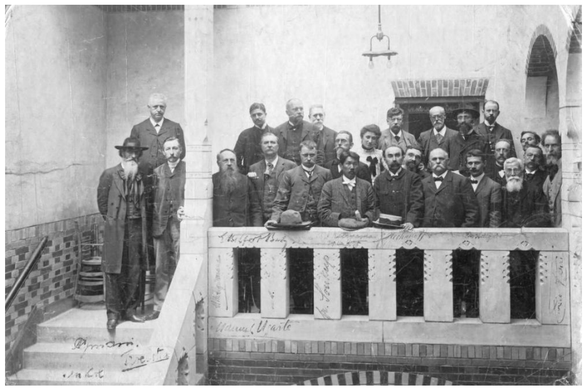
Revolutionary politics and thought, continued from page 2



Rosa Luxemburg and other international socialist leaders, including Karl Kautsky (Germany), Victor Adler (Austria), Georgii Plekhanov (Russia), Edouard Vaillant (France) and Sen Katayama (Japan).

In a certain sense that's kind of what Gramsci struggles with; I think Gramsci is the 1,000 lb. gorilla that we aren't talking about. Not just his concept of consent, or his view that the common sense of working people was not revolutionary, but not totally false. Take a common-sense view like: "If you do better in school, or you work harder on average, your life will be better." Obviously this profoundly ignores the forms of class and cultural reproduction that go on in education, or in the labor-force. But on the other hand, there is a certain partial degree of truth in it. From a Gramscian analysis, there is even a partial degree of truth, again masking a profound falsehood, in what we have been dealing with. The mass support for neoliberalism has been from the ability to hive off a certain sector (mostly non-unionized) of the white working class, based on some common sense views. First, that taxes are too high. They're not too high on corporations or the affluent. But because of a flat-rate Social Security tax, the regressive nature of property taxes, and a generally not very progressive tax structure, working-class people *do* pay too much in taxes.

The right wildly exaggerates the amount of funds that went to means-tested anti-poverty programs. We all know that. Not just white working-class people, but *e.g.,* African-American or Latino families that were above the poverty line, resented the fact that we don't have universal childcare, and we still don't have universal healthcare. People below the poverty line got Medicaid. If they got aid to families with dependent children (it is almost impossible to get temporary aid for needy families) it was well below the means of subsistence. The dirty little secret is that people on AFDC always took in other people's children, worked off the books, etc.. But again, we have to understand that the consciousness of the resentment, the means-tested welfare state, wasn't totally crazy. We don't analyze enough the relationship between common sense, and what we would call a more radical or revolutionary, "good" sense. I think there's a lot of insight we can get from Marx, say about the present crisis, which one of overproduction and overconsumption. It is a crisis of financialization, which is what Marx predicted would occur if the rate of profit fell. But the revolutionary project that comes out of that is problematized in the current period of the weakness of the entire Left. The reason why we get these flash insurgencies in the most squeezed countries—*e.g.,* in parts of Latin America and southern Europe, or in the U.S.—is that there is a tremendous realization that basic human needs aren't being met, and that people's lives are being decimated by austerity and neoliberalism. But there is no real faith in an alternative.

What are the governing models of the Marxist, socialist, tradition? On the one hand, there is top-down industrialization in developing countries. On the other hand, there is social democracy, which did not ultimately yield a strong enough, radical enough labor movement. Once profits got squeezed in the early 70's, they couldn't face the neoliberal attack on the institutions of labor, democratic forms of state environmental and financial regulations, etc. These attacks were successful, and obviously for politically pragmatic but ultimately disastrous reasons, the leadership of social democracy certainly moved to the right and becomes neoliberalized—including in the Democratic party leadership in America. They claim to understand now that you can't have restrictions on labor markets as you used to, or on freedom of capital. It's not clear: We have an alternative—democratic control over social surplus, extensive de-commodification of basic human needs, curtailment of the working life, and some form of a guaranteed income—but we don't have a party or a vehicle to establish it.

Capitalism is incredibly productive, so why are we working longer, and talking about extending the working life? Today in the United States, 300,000 auto-workers make as many cars as 1.8 million did in 1970. That's how much productivity has increased with robotization, etc.. Why aren't we benefitting from that? Why aren't we working less? This obviously has to do with the fact that capitalists control the accumulation process.

In theorizing reformist practice, if you don't think its revolutionary enough, I don't really care. In some ways I have Trotsky's view, wherever there is fascism, socialists fight for the rights of slaves.[9] I don't think there is fascism now, and I'm not saying we have slavery, but we have a low wage near enslaved labor. We have student debt-peonage. We have immigrants who do a major amount of care work, and who ought to have immediate citizenship for themselves and their children. We have a public education system that is totally shot through by class and racial inequalities, and is being privatized in the city as we speak. There are plenty of struggles that socialists have to be involved in, because I think we have to be involved in any struggle for the rights of the demos against the rights of the oligarchs.

Chris Cutrone: The last 20th century was characterized as one of wars and revolutions. I would like to re-characterize it slightly, to a century of war and revolution, singular. The 20th century was the century of the crisis of capitalism, and that crisis was expressed through war and revolution. Hannah Arendt's 1962 book *On Revolution* begins its discussion of politics with an introduction on "War and Revolution," offering that these were the two paramount political issues of the day, after all ideological justifications handed down from the 19th century, such as nationalism, capitalism and socialism or communism, had faded.

Arendt began her discussion, properly, with Lenin: Lenin, who called for turning the "world war" among national states into a global "civil war" between the workers and the capitalists—it almost happened. Lenin represented to Arendt the opposition of revolution to war. It is said that a Nazi diplomat once quipped that the only beneficiary of WWII would be Trotsky. For most of the 20th century, this is what was assumed, that war was the failure of politics, and that the political failure of the ruling class in war would lead to social revolution. This was once a reasonable assumption that we cannot however share today, for the political issues of the revolution, while not going away, have been driven underground, no longer manifesting as politics. Arendt's fears have been confirmed: It was her rather hopeful and optimistic prognosis that modern history was the history of revolution, and war merely the revolution's epiphenomenon. Today that is hard for us to perceive.

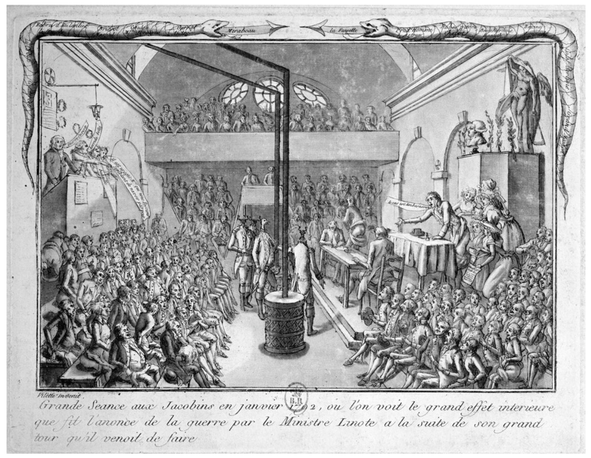
Arendt predicted that due to "mutual assured nuclear destruction" in the Cold War, the 20th century would cease to be characterized as a century of war but would remain a century of revolution. But the opposite has taken place after the end of the Cold War. It is not that war has been eclipsed by revolution—as Lenin would have hoped—but rather the opposite, that war has eclipsed revolution. Arendt dismissed De Maistre's statement that, "Counterrevolution is not the revolution in reverse but the opposite of revolution." But De Maistre was correct and Arendt mistaken: the 20th century became a century of war not revolution because it was a century of counterrevolution.

To recognize, with von Clausewitz, that "war is politics by other means," does not mean the reverse, that "politics is war by other means." In other words, while the early 19th century liberal Benjamin Constant pointed out that moderns achieve by social commerce and peaceful politics what was once achieved by the Ancients through war, this does not mean that politics is reducible to war. If war is politics by other means, then we must add that war is not the best and might indeed be the worst means for achieving political ends. Revolution might be the alternative to war, but that does not mean that war is an acceptable alternative to revolution. It is important as well to note that Arendt recognized that while wars were a timeless, perennial feature of civilization, revolution was quintessentially modern. So, what we might say is that it appears that the 20th century became in retrospect a century of wars rather than revolutions the degree to which revolutionary modernity was rolled back successfully by the counterrevolution.

Arendt discusses "freedom" in an ancient rather than specifically modern sense *à la* Benjamin Constant, when she points out that for the Ancients wars were fought not for freedom but for gain; and that for moderns revolution is inseparable from freedom: that a particular danger lies in the concept of wars for freedom, precisely because it conflates war and revolution, at the expense of proper political considerations, drowning the separate issues of each in the phenomenon of violence, to which she thought neither revolution nor war could be reduced. However, it would appear that today not only war and revolution are reduced to violence, but also politics and society. Politics seems reduced to "war by other means," indeed to violence by other means. That politics and social power have been reduced to violence is the surest sign of the "success," so to speak, of the counter-revolution. This is what it means for the Left to say that,

"Revolutionary politics and thought" continues below

Revolutionary politics and thought, continued from page 3


Grande Séance aux Jacobins en janvier 92, ou l'on voit le grand effet interesser que fit l'annonce de la guerre par le Ministre Lnote a la Suite de son grand tour qu'il venoit de faire

Meeting of the Jacobin club in January 1794.

thinking, therefore, would be the recognition of the repetition and of the contradiction.

Responses

NM: I don't think that neoliberals could be viewed as the vanguard of bourgeois revolutions today; I would say that it is the contrary. Neoliberalism is the vanguard of the destruction of the last remnants of bourgeois culture. The bourgeoisie was a class that died some decades ago. I think contemporary oligarchies have little to do with the classical bourgeoisie, as it was only ever interested in seeking profits and exploiting society. The classical bourgeoisie wanted to create a viable form of society. Today, oligarchies want only to *loot*, as David Harvey said in response to the London suburban riots in 2011. The lower class is following this ideology of the ruling neoliberal oligarchy, which is just slash-and-burn.

DR: My democratic sensibilities will allow me to make one comment, and give my two minutes to the people. I have heard a lot on this panel about thought, but not much about politics. How do we proceed? What is to be done?

SG: I wonder what Chris would make of the celebration of the *Communist Manifesto*'s 150th anniversary in 1998. You had an almost universal laudation from the *Wall Street Journal*, to the *Economist*, to the *New York Times*. It seems to mean that capitalism has recognized the way in which Marx is really praising the bourgeoisie in that text. He didn't come to bury the bourgeoisie, but to praise it to high heavens. I'm wondering how that fits in terms of what you're suggesting. Isn't that the pre-history of a certain kind of appropriation, not only of the shallow conception of freedom you get in neoliberalism?

JS: To Nikos: Financialization of capitalism may or may not be a new period or form. It is not clear anymore that there is a national bourgeoisie, held responsible to its people, and any notion of a patrician bourgeoisie is certainly out the window. The search for short-term profit certainly is striking. What is to be done? There are limits ecologically, but even in our society there are huge deprivations of material needs that are generating forms of resistance. I don't think you should come out of here without talking about the insurgency around raising the minimum wage, and immigrant rights. I think the new working class will be immigrant-led. Whatever you say about globalization, a lot of stuff in this country can't move without workers. Healthcare, construction, restaurants, retail—basically 10% of the country works at Wal-Mart. They're all going to suffer huge cuts in their living standards. Many of you have connections to the academy. The neoliberalization of the academy is part of the reason for the crisis of intellectuals: Everything is about niche production, adding new lines to your CV, and there's no solidarity. There's been an incredible proletarianization of academic labor. A hint at the dominance of neoliberal ideology is that few people know that the real source of the crisis is that *per capita* funding from the state—per person and per university—is down 40% from the mid-70s. The abandonment by the state of the education of its own citizens is part of the crisis. I'll conclude by saying that our job should be to render relatively transparent the opaque forms of domination and subordination of capitalist ideology. A lot of my colleagues render the transparent opaque.

CC: About the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the *Communist Manifesto*: This is just rank ideology. The 90s were a boom period; what followed was a bust. To get to Nikos' point of the bourgeoisie destroying bourgeois society, we have to be careful with the categories of "the bourgeoisie" and "the capitalist." Is this the entrepreneur? The finance rentier class (Lenin's coupon-clippers from *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*)? My focus is on the politics and political actors—not the ruling class understood as the moneybags, rich people. Take Jeffrey Sachs, a neoliberal bourgeois revolutionary of our time. He was honest enough to realize that his program for revolution didn't work, and now he is an apostate neoliberal who has taken the other track. He is clear on his political vision, and has changed the means to the end. First, it was "shock therapy" and free-market reforms; now, it is transnational organizations, charity, and reinvestment. I try to keep my remarks constrained to politics, which is why I brought up the neocons and the neoliberals as the political actors of the last generation. The Left has to aspire to outdo these people, to outdo them as revolutionaries. To do this we have to be clear on the revolution, but I think the Left has joined the counterrevolution. Resistance to capitalism is a non-starter, politically—trying to transform capitalism, to get beyond capitalism, that's something else. But resistance to capitalism? Hopeless.

Q&A

I feel that when we reach for catastrophe as an explanation of our current situation, its motivated by a compelling desire to make the mundane profound. The IPCC report apparently tells us that we're past the turning point. I'm old enough to remember the Club of Rome, which also said we'd passed a turning point, and that by 1970 all human life would be impossible. It's a common theme of Marxism to say that the rate of profit is past that point at which the only future is barbarism, socialism or barbarism. Well, where's the barbarism? I see civilization, a forward march in life expectancy, literacy, health. The carrying capacity of the Earth has been increased to six billion over an amazingly short period of time. What a fantastic success! If you wanted to dramatize telling the story of human history, wouldn't you begin with the remarkable potential of this point of human civilization?

JS: Even if what you say is true, you must admit that there is an ecological crisis, one that will have to be dealt with by a change of social and political power relations. Sea levels are rising: it's an empirical reality. But I'm enough of a modernist to think that—if we have the right politics and transformations in politics and policy—there are technological solutions to the problems that technology creates. In that sense there's a dialectic of the Enlightenment that has both positive and negative aspects. Reason can solve the problems that it poses, but it can also create a lot of serious problems.

DR: Human beings are in a constant state of denial, as Freud wrote about at the turn of the 20th century. I don't think we understand reality better by sounding like a happy journalist on CNN. To make a comparison between the IPCC and the Club of Rome is, quite frankly, specious. Who was the Club of Rome? The IPCC is a conglomerate of almost 3,000 scientists who review scientific evidence, already published and adjudicated. How can we deny that? How can we deny the scientific basis of that analysis? We have to see what the political implications are of that evidence.

SG: It was only around six or seven years ago that the CIA released a report of its projections for deepening climate and civic crises throughout the world, and they were planning accordingly. There is a sense today that crime is on the decline, but there is a militarization of the police. One has to ask why this is. Perhaps this is a kind of preparation for the coming crises—'barbarism', in a sense, on the horizon. What this question articulated would be received quite sympathetically by our current government—an absolutely reactionary, authoritarian government that is not doing anything it can to forestall climate change. It is doing everything to deepen and further the coming economic crisis. I find it quite amazing that you suggested what you did.

NM: "Barbarism" should not always be imagined as a pile of corpses, or stuff like that. I will refer to Oswald Spengler, who described the barbarism to come as more and more inhuman situations within a highly civilized environment. This describes very accurately what's going on today.

CC: I agree with the formulation Nikos just provided, of increasingly inhuman situations being produced within a nonetheless civilized society. But I would turn the question of barbarism to that of political responsibility: In other words, the decline of political responsibility

"Revolutionary politics and thought" continues below

Revolutionary politics and thought, continued from above

but for the Right, the revolution would be peaceful, without violence—political force is not violence.

Arendt, like von Clausewitz, sought to preserve the political content of war. But Benjamin Constant, like other liberals, considered war to be, not merely the failure of politics, but a crime. Unlike for the Ancients who celebrated war, indeed as among the highest of values, after every modern war people search for who was criminally culpable for the regrettable catastrophe. Carl Schmitt thought that this pointed to the dehumanization inherent in liberalism, its attempt to suppress the war of politics through its criminalization of war, reducing to his mind society to mere "commerce and entertainment." It should not be for the Left to define politics, like Schmitt, in terms of war. Rather, the issue is the pursuit of freedom without war. If the liberal ideal of bourgeois society as the replacement of war by commerce—by not only peaceful competition but indeed cooperative competition for the benefit of all—has failed, then we must interrogate the nature of that failure and not naturalize it. The liberal ideal may also remain that of socialism.

This raises the issue of war in our particular moment, today, the time of an apparently quickly fading neoconservatism and a continuing if chastened neoliberalism. What are these ideologies with respect to revolution? We might say that there is an antinomy of neoconservatism versus neoliberalism, that neoliberalism prefers to seek to achieve through the market what neoconservatism is content to seek through war, and that this antinomy points to the form of the revolution in our time, that is, *capitalism*, and its political antinomies. For capitalism *is* the revolution, however it is also the counterrevolution. Both the neoliberals and neoconservatives seek to further the revolution—capitalism—but do so through what Marxists must consider the counterrevolution.

Modern politics, in this sense, can be considered the war, so to speak, within the revolution: the political counterrevolution within the revolutionizing of society in capitalism, and the yet still ongoing irrepressible revolution of capitalism within the politics of the counterrevolution. Modern politics is concerned with the values of the massive changes occurring within capitalism —othe values and direction of the revolution. Once we recognize that modern history does not consist of occasional revolutions but rather of *the* revolution, one single process and trajectory of revolution, which has been more or less poorly manifested, recognized and fought-out, we can better situate the stakes of politics.

The counterrevolution, as the war within the revolution, is the reaction against the failure of the revolution: the degeneration of the revolution into war expressed through the counterrevolution. So what *is* the revolution? The modern era is one of revolution, that is, the overthrow of traditional civilization. The past few hundred years have been characterized by the most far-reaching and deepest ever transformation of the world. More has changed and has changed more rapidly than at any other moment of history. The predominant way in which this change has taken place is through avowed bourgeois social relations, which are essentially the relations of the exchange of labor as a commodity, what Adorno called the "law of labor." This has been recognized clearly by bourgeois protagonists as well as by their adversaries. Both revolutionaries and reactionaries have characterized this process in bourgeois terms, the terms of the modern city.

The American revolutionary Thomas Jefferson offered a clear characterization of the stakes of this revolution of which he was an important advocate and political agent. Jefferson, in his letter of January 3, 1793 to U.S. Ambassador to France William Short about the Jacobins, wrote:

> *The tone of your letters had for some time given me pain, on account of the extreme warmth with which they censured the proceedings of the Jacobins of France.... In the struggle which was necessary, many guilty persons fell without the forms of trial, and with them some innocent. These I deplore as much as any body, and shall deplore some of them to the day of my death. But I deplore them as I should have done had they fallen in battle. It was necessary to use the arm of the people, a machine not quite so blind as balls and bombs, but blind to a certain degree. A few of their cordial friends met at their hands, the fate of enemies. But time and truth will rescue and embalm their memories, while their posterity will be enjoying that very liberty for which they would never have hesitated to offer up their lives. The liberty of the whole earth was depending on the issue of the contest, and was ever such a prize won with so little innocent blood? My own affections have been deeply wounded by some of the martyrs to this cause, but rather than it should have failed, I would have seen half the earth desolated. Were there but an Adam and an Eve left in every country, and left free, it would be better than as it now is.*

In 1793, the Jacobins had restarted the calendar, retrospectively beginning with year one of the Republic in 1792. The French Revolution also introduced the metric system of measurements, which has since become the universal standard. A new epoch was to have dawned. That the revolution has since then come to seem not the overthrow but the rather continuation of traditional civilization is only an effect of the need and failure to advance the revolution.

Politics since then has been concerned with the direction of this revolution. Only very isolated extreme figures and only for relatively brief historical intervals have rejected the politics of the bourgeois revolution. For instance, several years ago, in an open letter to President George W. Bush, President of the Islamic Republic in Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, wrote that the project of liberal democratic capitalism had clearly failed and that therefore it was time to return to the values of traditional civilization in religion, to Islam and Christianity, respectively.

Since the 1970s, there have been two extremely active movements more or less proximate to the centers of political power at a global scale that have sought to further the bourgeois revolution. They have not been of the Left. Neoconservatism and neoliberalism have taken up the mantle abandoned by the Left in promoting the revolution of bourgeois society, promising the world freedom. In many ways the neoliberals have done so more radically than the neoconservatives. Still, even the neocons must be reckoned as bourgeois revolutionaries—which their traditionalist paleoconservative rivals, let alone the religious fundamentalists, have clearly recognized. The strange bedfellows of Christian conservatives and neoconservatives have fought the properly political battle of what Lenin called the "who-whom" question: Have the Christians used the neocons, or the neocons used the Christians? I think it is clear that the neocons, though now ideologically discredited on certain policy questions (after the Iraq war in particular), won that battle: they used the Christians to attain political power. But the neoliberals have, despite the recent global economic crisis of the past several years, really triumphed. Neoliberalism is the "new normal" throughout the world; Margaret Thatcher was right, "There is no alternative." Furthermore, it is under neoliberal leadership that the world is currently being revolutionized. We might say that the neoliberals have fought in the vanguard, and the neoconservatives in the rear-guard, of the continuing bourgeois revolution over the course of the past generation, the last 40 years.

Where does this leave the avowed "Left," today? There has been a great deal of confusion in the past generation in particular, but also more broadly since the early 20th century, about the direction and stakes of the revolution from the point of view of the "Left." Arendt, for instance, pointed out how it was remarkable that freedom had dropped out of the vocabulary of revolutionaries. What would have been obvious to Marx and Engels, or to Lenin or Trotsky as Marxists, that the struggle for socialism was to further and complete, and ultimately transcend the bourgeois revolution in freedom, has become an obscure issue today.

Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* parsed out the issue of socialism in the 19th century in terms of conservative-reactionary versus progressive-emancipatory varieties, deeming only "proletarian socialism" a reliable agent of overcoming the problem of capitalism in the emancipatory direction of freedom. Other varieties were deemed "petit-bourgeois," that is, reproductive of the problem of capitalism and obscuring its essential contradictions. The original socialist critique of capitalism was that the capitalists were unreliable revolutionaries, too opportunistically conservative to confidently promote the revolution of which they had been however the beneficiaries historically. Rather, that task of fulfilling the revolution in modern society had fallen to the working class.

In the 20th century, this became muddled, in that "new revolutionary subjects" were sought to promote the revolution after the apparent failure of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries to further the revolutionary advance to socialism. But today these purported new social-revolutionary classes and social groups have also clearly failed. Neither peasants nor anti-colonialists nor oppressed ethno-cultural minorities nor women nor sexual deviants have furthered the advance of socialism. If anything, such politics have only confounded the issue even more. We are left with the problem of the results of incomplete revolution—capitalism—but without any apparent revolutionary subjects to address and overcome this problem. The best on offer seems an indeterminate "democracy," but that has a storied and problematic history as well, going back to the Jacobins themselves if not earlier. Moreover, since the mid-19th century, the democratic revolution has been an engine for the reproduction of capitalism.

What the revolution has given us since Marx's time is not socialism but more extensive and deeper capitalism. Moreover, Marx's recognition of the revolutionary character of capitalism has been lost. The reproduction of capitalism has taken largely conservative-reactionary forms. This is because the issue of capitalism itself has become obscured. This has had a profound effect on politics itself. The ostensible "Left" has allowed itself to become defensive, and to thus imagine that the principal task has been, rather, the "resistance" to capitalism. A one-sided and confused "anti-capitalism" has replaced the struggle for socialism. Worse, the "Left" has internalized not only cynicism about the bourgeois revolution, but even the conservative-reactionary rejection of the revolution itself. Marx has gone from being a revolutionary to becoming a "master of suspicion," and has been profoundly misread as skeptical or even cynical regarding modern, bourgeois society and its revolutionary potential. The "Left" has thus become a new Right. It has not only compromised itself but actively contributes to the confounding and obscuring of the revolution that still tasks the world.

This means that only opportunists—the Right—have allowed themselves to be politically active, but have been compromised in their activity precisely by such opportunism. Neoliberalism and neoconservativism are clear examples of this, but so is political religious fundamentalism. But before them so was Stalinism. As Trotsky put it, Stalinism was the "great organizer of defeat," meaning the political "leadership" of the organized accommodation of defeat. As such, Stalinism was also, ideologically, the apologetics for defeat. This was done through calling defeat victory, or, the affirming of the course of the revolution through opportunistic grief. Thus, the 20th century was called "progress" when there was none. No wonder that postmodernism's opposition to Marxism—really to Stalinism—was first and foremost an opposition to ideas of historical progress and of history—that is, universal history itself.

What characterizes the last two hundred years is the relative lack of consciousness, and unfortunately increasingly so, of the on-going bourgeois revolution. To date, Marxism has offered not merely the best but really the only way out of this deficiency of consciousness. Specifically, Marxism offered the diagnosis of the necessary if symptomatic character of that lack of consciousness. The bourgeois revolution without consciousness is what Marx called "capitalism;" it was the rendering of the revolution "objective"—an object of mere contemplation, an unfolding catastrophe rather than a process of freedom—abdicating the task of consciousness, which alone could offer the possibility of the continuation of the revolution as a matter of freedom.

If we experience the return, the repetition of the bourgeois revolution, then this is as the reproduction of capitalism. But the repetition is an opportunity for advancing the revolution, if however its self-contradiction, the war of the counterrevolution within the failure of the revolution, still dominates us. The task of revolutionary

"Revolutionary politics and thought" continues on page 4

could be an index of increasing barbarism. What we are talking about with revolutionary thought and politics is the ability to take responsibility for the massive changes the world is undergoing, and will continue to undergo. I take the question's point not to be denial of a problem, but rather confidence in the potential ability to address that problem. I would like to echo Joseph's point that reason is the solution to its own problems, and that technology can solve the problems created by technology. This comes with the proviso that technology is a human doing, but in alienated form. It is thus about what *we* are doing: whether we can take responsibility for it, and what form that might take.

NM: Technology is not at all instrumental or natural—it is materialized ideology. One of the most important dimensions of a social transformation would be the transformation of technology. But technology is not neutral; it is an expression of the dominant worldview of that society. Every form of society has its own technical system, and so if we critique capitalism, we must critique its technical system as well. Take Taylorism, for example. Lenin wanted to use Taylorism for the cause of socialism. But Taylorism is an inherently oppressive and alienating system, which springs from capitalist ideology. I can't imagine a socialist society with Taylorist forms of working.

UBS trading floor, Stamford, CT, USA.

We shouldn't indulge in catastrophism or crisis-mongering. Catastrophism is not lucidly reflecting on what is going to come; it always believes that there is no solution, and no possible exit. The greatest catastrophists were always those who took techno-science to be omnipotent. That's why Heidegger, for example, when he demonized technology, counter-poised to it *Gelassenheit*—serenity. But when people indulge in catastrophic thinking, I think this is valid because it at least expresses a kind of vigilance. Techno-optimism expresses a lack of responsibility towards what's going on in society.

DR: I consider myself a public intellectual, but also an activist. Though I forecast a dark future in actuality, it doesn't hold me back for a second in doing what I have to do, want to do, and enjoy doing, as a political activist. I want to share with you a historical experience. In the 1950's, the two superpowers, the USSR and the US, were testing nuclear weapons in the atmosphere. The effects of that pollution of the environment are well-known. There was a great deal of panic at the time about what this was headed towards—namely, WWIII. A massive movement arose in response to this, the nuclear disarmament movement, which was unprecedented in terms of its size and organization. Now we didn't get nuclear disarmament, but what we did get was the nuclear test ban treaty. So, as a result of that mass movement clouded by fear, we brought us back from the precipice. That may or may not happen with the ecological crisis.

SG: I certainly don't think I'm advocating catastrophism. I think it is necessary to think through possible alternative understandings of both reason and freedom, in such a way as to address what Horkheimer and Adorno called the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* which was envisioned in terms of a mindfulness of nature. Capitalism has a decreasing capacity to reproduce the natural conditions that would enable its continuation. I don't think that's terrible controversial. My conclusion would be that only the hand that wields the sword can heal the wound. A dialectical conception of reason is absolutely vital. Then we could recognize that technology is not some mystical thing, but is a form of reason. In order for a critique of that form to be carried out, another conception needs to be itself worked out. That is in part the project of the relationship between revolutionary thought and practice.

JS: I do think the ecological crisis does open the possibility for left critique and action. But whatever you want to call it, we aren't going to get an emancipatory politics of the city without accomplishing much greater public control over social investment. I don't think the corporate world is going to provide the changes in the way we produce and consume that are needed if we're going to sustain human life on Earth. There are flash eruptions against neoliberalism occurring across the world. I think there is a role for Marxism or socialism, as a form of political organization, to help cohere this social unrest and protest into some kind of governing emancipatory project. We are in a period of crisis, where a lot of people do know that something's profoundly wrong, and that human well-being is threatened. But what to do with these openings is what we have to sort out by actually doing politics.

CC: I want to make a closing plea for the plausibility, even if somewhat politically distant, of Marxism as still in the present. It is present to the degree to which we can call the contradiction of society at a global scale of being that between wage labor and capital. Do we still live in a society that reproduces the conditions for wage labor? Do we still live in a society that is dominated by the need to valorize capital? I think both of these are still in effect. This is not just a description of an objective state of the economy, but is also a description of a circumstance for potential politics. Marx was not only a philosopher of modern history, or an analyst of the capitalist economy, but also a political strategist. His orientation to the wage-laboring class was a strategic estimation of politics. In that respect, what we lack, unlike previous historical phases of capitalism, is an adequate political mediation of the problem of capitalism. In other words, capitalism doesn't manifest at the level of politics, where the contradiction between capital and wage labor is fought out. Perhaps it won't manifest in the future in the way it did in the past, but it seems to me that the alternative to that attempt to politicize the capital and wage-labor relationship will be further barbarism: The decline of potential political responsibility, and the locking-up of politics among a small group of ideologues and technocrats. |**P**

Transcribed by Thomas Willis

1. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09.htm>.
2. < http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>.
3. < https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm>.
4. Marx, 'The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophies of Nature', (1839-41). Quoted in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert C. Tucker ed., Norton 1978 (p. 10).
5. *Negative Dialectics*, Trans. E.B. Ashton, Continuum, 1973 (p. 3).
6. Ibid. (p. 15).
7. 'Future City', *New Left Review* 21, May-June 2003. URL=<http://newleftreview.org/II/21/fredric-jameson-future-city>.
8. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1915/junius/ch01.htm>

Revolutionary politics and thought, continued from page 1

be made in the direction of an egalitarian and democratic society. This is the case because the major social evolution of the 20th century, and especially of its postwar period, was the gradual proselytizing and conversion of exploited classes to the consumer ethos. People actively want and cherish consumption, since what they dream of is a selfish improvement of their position in the social hierarchy. Long gone is the glorious epoch of social movements opposed the existing society, fighting for the creation of a more democratic and humane one. The labor movement slowly transformed itself into a big lobby that wanted nothing more than the amelioration of workers' material conditions. Radical artistic and intellectual movements degenerated into a playful ornament of consumer society, celebrating the pseudo-liberty of the contemporary individual by elevating cultural relativism and political nihilism to ultimate philosophical principles.

As they intermingle with the mounting ecological crisis, the anthropological consequences of such social and cultural decline call for a total reinterpretation of our collective and individual needs. There can be no serious or coherent anti-capitalist engagement today that does not see itself as part of a far greater opposition, one to

Classroom at the University of Lyon with markings on wall reading "DE L'HISTOIRE KARL MARX," made during student occupation of parts of the campus as part of the May 1968 events in France.

what Karl Polanyi called "the Great Transformation." This is the elevation of the economy to an autonomous sphere that dominates society, imposing its norms and values on every other region and domain of social life. Consumer society is just the degenerate form of this economism and its concomitant technophilia.

As far as Marx's ideas on the duty of revolutionary theory and politics to consciously complete the old work, I would say things are no longer so simple. In many ways, present day necessities force us to criticize and even reject a great part of what the labor movement, the modernist artistic and cultural avant-garde, and the student movements of the 60's said and did. And it goes without saying that such a change of anthropological paradigm necessitates a profound unity of theory and praxis, together with our fight against the neoliberal counterattack from the ruling oligarchies, as well as the mounting far-right movements. We have to rethink traditional revolutionary values and ways of thinking, as well as reflect on the form that a democratic and egalitarian society could take in this unprecedented context. As Castoriadis used to say, "Revolutionary politics can only have meaning as a thoughtful doing."

Political currents such as the French "de-growth" movement offer a vivid example of the difficulties such an enterprise would face. One of the most eminent is the academicization of intellectual life, part of the profound technicalization of social life that characterizes contemporary Western societies. Thinking becomes a separated domain, a realm reserved for a certain category of experts, usually state or corporate nourished, living enclosed behind the gates of their university ghetto. Unfortunately, this eminently oligarchic tendency hasn't spurred the Left at all. Its Leninist and technophilic heritage gave birth in the 50s to an army of professional would-be prophets, who wanted to teach revolutionary politics without having ever participated in the least political activity. This is a tendency dominant in France, for example. Judging from this point of view, the Althusserian distinction between romantic and scientific parts of Marxism is really useful for us—even if Althusser proposed it in a completely different context, and in a schematic and simplistic manner. As an orthodox Marxist and Stalinist, and also part of the upper and most oligarchic strata of the French academic complex, Althusser wanted to transform Marxism into a rigorous science. He wanted to transform a revolutionary theory that called for the surpassing of itself as pure theory, into a pseudo-science of social evolution. By doing so he only showed how immersed he was in the dominant bourgeois and rationalistic worldview. But what is more important, he showed us that this goes not only for Marx, but also for anarchism. See for example the fondness of Bakunin for August Comte's positivism.

I believe that we have to openly oppose this stratum of pseudo-revolutionary academics, people like Alain Badiou, Judith Butler, and Edward Said, who are considered as the major thinkers of the Left nowadays. This stratum does nothing more than spread confusionist ideologies and destroy the activity of radical thinking by presenting it as a cascade of incomprehensible and unreadable rhetorical tricks. We have to echo Lyotard and attack the separation of intellectual from manual labor as the very basis of bourgeois and even aristocratic social edifices. Thinking should be reintegrated into social life, as it was in older times. I dare to say that we need something like, as William Morris might say, an artisan or craft ethos, which denies any distinction between intellectual and manual. This would both insinuate the intellectual into the material and the concrete, and raise the manual to a creative and thoughtful activity.

Dimitrios Roussopoulos: The word "revolution" or "revolutionary" in the context of this conference is problematic for a number of reasons. One is that we do not have the time to really define this word. I would like to put it aside, and substitute the word "radical" instead, as in "radical politics." The definition of "politics" that I will use is one that suggests that the radical or fundamental transformation of society by a decentralization of political and economic power, and its widest dispersal throughout society. What I will say draws from two theoretical streams. One is the anarchist and libertarian stream that draws on the works and reflections of Patrick Geddes, Lewis Mumford, Paul Goodman, and Murray Bookchin. The second is the Marxist stream that draws from the works of Henri Lefebvre, Margit Meyer, Peter Marcuse, and David Harvey. This leads me to the core of the radical project in theory and practice, as I understand it. What I believe is seriously missing in the reconstruction of a radical Left is a geopolitical understanding and analysis of what is possible. This means we must examine our world as strategically as possible, and take a number of fundamental facts into serious consideration, and bring it into the center of our reflection.

One of the United Nations agencies is called, as you know, UN-Habitat. UN-Habitat has identified a number of cities as global cities—about 47 of them. These cities are determined as concentrated nodules of corporate capitalism. It is these global cities that the major multinational corporations work out of, make their decisions, and dominate the world economy. To the extent that this is true, we then have to introduce another factor into our analysis. We all know that in 2003, one of the most important historic shifts has taken place with regard to human civilization. For the first time in history, the majority of human beings that inhabit this planet are now living in cities and towns. Grasping this reality has very serious political and social consequences for any radical project, any project that pretends to want to reorganize daily life. And so, unless we take that perspective seriously, and look at what can be done in the face of massive urbanization—which will reach a critical point by 2025—and unless we grasp what that means for the daily life of the people who live in these cities and towns, and unless we have an understanding of what kind of radical politics can arise from this understanding, so that we can shift power in a significant way, I think we are misleading ourselves.

As an intellectual if one never seriously undertakes work on the ground— work in neighborhoods, communities, and cities, with ordinary people, dealing with the politics of everyday life—we will never be able to crystallize a social force that will confront the existing power structure in significant ways. Let me give you just one example: In 1968, in the city that I live in, Montreal, a developer announced that they were going to destroy a six-block area of downtown in order to create the city of the 21st century. The funding for that project came from the Rockefeller Foundation, the pension fund of British postal workers, and a huge international insurance company. We undertook a major struggle that took eleven years for us to win. And we won. We not only saved the neighborhood—which is inhabited by approximately 1,500 working poor and déclassé people—but created the largest non-profit cooperative housing project in North America. Even more significantly, within that six-block area, we abolished private property. I repeat: we abolished private property through a land trust. If you can possibly imagine this, there can be no buying and selling of property in a six-block downtown area of a major city in Canada. This is what I am trying to suggest. By taking into serious consideration a geopolitical perspective, and asking how power can shift at the base of society, we can zero in on strategies that not only affect the daily lives of people, but mobilize them to go even further in their demands for participation in decision-making processes in the urban milieux where power is concentrated.

Try to imagine, therefore, what radical politics spin off from that. Emerging out of this particular people's victory, and subsequent people's victories in other parts of

"Revolutionary politics and thought" continues below

Revolutionary politics and thought, continued from above

the city, we began a process to fundamentally redefine political power in the city of Montreal. We introduced a number of radical political institutions, which involved public consultation, the advocacy of citizen rights, and a new definition of urban citizenship. We have done this in conjunction with allies and contacts in other cities both in Canada and internationally. There is a whole reconfiguration of grassroots politics that is taking place that we have to be aware of. This is what I want to bring to your attention.

Samir Gandesha: I'd like to preface my remarks by referring to something that Dimitrios said in a previous panel, which is that we should wipe the slate clean and talk about how to bring about radical, direct democracy. This panel has been framed with signal figures of the revolutionary tradition like Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky, and Adorno. But it could benefit from counter-readings of the tradition by Italian autonomist writers like Paolo Virno, Antonio Negri, and Michael Hardt, and also the fragment on the machine in the *Grundrisse*. They frame the question somewhat differently. I'm not saying I agree with this tradition: It fails quite abjectly in registering the extent to which the Left is in crisis, and therefore it can't really address the prospects in store for a reversal of this situation. The emphasis on immaterial labor fails curiously to account for what one social critic once called the "falling rate of intelligence," which seems only to be getting worse. It may seem easy to dismiss, *e.g.,* Hardt & Negri's ideas as stemming exclusively from the "university ghetto." But this is difficult to say even for Negri, given his own militant past and the organic relation between the Italian Autonomists and actual workers' struggles.

In order for this discussion to be meaningful, it must engage with debates taking place *today*; not just wrestle with the ghosts of 1848, 1917, and 1968—important as those dates, and figures like Lenin, Trotsky, and Adorno may be. One reason for this is that the nature of capitalism has been fundamentally altered by techno-science: both *qua* productive force, and as the basis for countering labor militancy through forced redundancy, de-skilling, and redoubled forms of surveillance. This has in a contradictory way opened up new avenues for communication and organization, ones Marx was already praising the bourgeoisie for in the *Communist Manifesto*. His emphasis on communications in particular was really important, and has an actuality that needs to be grasped. We see the extent to which new communications technologies made possible opposition movements like in Iran with the Green Movement in 2009, and the Arab Spring in 2011.

I wish I could agree in a straightforward way that revolutionary theory and practice would primarily be about consciously completing the old work of social emancipation. I take this to be what Marx is suggesting in his letter to Ruge.[1] He writes of redeeming a reason that has "always existed, but not always in a rational form," and that this "reform of consciousness consists *only* in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in awakening it out of its dream about itself, in *explaining* to it the meaning of its own actions." In other words, Marx held that the revolution was to be understood as the completion of the bourgeois project, which had only realized itself in a one-sided political way. The rational form of reason must be defined by its ability to arrest and reverse the chaos of unbridled market forces, which threaten life on this planet as we know it. For Marx, a rational form of reason entailed a de-mystification and de-alienation of social relations, by way of a negation of every instance of immediacy. Quintessentially, this immediacy was that of the commodity form, and bourgeois conceptions of freedom and equality. The two come together at the very end of Chapter 6 of *Capital*, marking the transition from the moment of exchange of commodities to that of production. What Marx had in mind was an immanent critique of bourgeois social relations. It was through what he called making petrified relations "dance by singing their own tune to them"[2] that the promises inherent within capitalism could be realized, *i.e.,* the actual realization of a principle of justice, understood as "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need."[3]

But during the crisis of the early decades of the 20th century, the social contradiction between capital and wage labor failed to generate a revolutionary transformation of capitalist societies. The key reason for such a failure, which Lukacs had already recognized in the aftermath of the German and Hungarian revolutions, was the phenomenon of reification. Mystification could not simply be overcome *via* transformation of the scene of exchange, because the fetishistic logic of capitalism had penetrated deeply into every nook and cranny of life. This especially included philosophical concepts, which lead to seemingly insoluble antinomies and oppositions. When these antinomies were overcome, it was only in thought, and not in practice. According to Lukács, this would only happen in the revolutionary activity of the proletariat, which would finally, in the words of Marx, "make the world philosophical."[4] However, rather than making the real abstraction of the commodity form concrete, through the grasping of itself as the identical subject-object of history, what happened instead one could call a "false" concretion of the abstract logic of capital. The stranger, the other, emphatically *not* capital, became understood as the alien power dominating the life-worlds of European societies in the midst of an unprecedented economic and social crisis, leading to the radical particularism of fascism. We see the ghosts of fascism currently haunting Europe, particularly in Lukács' native Hungary in the form of the rabidly anti-semitic *Jobbik* party.

Adorno implicitly invokes this scenario in the opening sentence of *Negative Dialectics*, where he says: "Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed."[5] Given that its subject and object were already mediated, or related to one another, theoretical reflection—particularly that which sought to locate the *limits* of theory, what Adorno called "thinking conceptually beyond the concept"—was itself a form of *praxis*.[6] This he made clear in his "Idea of Natural History," which, in my view, must form at least part of the starting-point for the discussion of the relation of thought and action. It gains renewed importance in light of the ecological crisis, which is not only fast approaching, but already here. Adorno articulated a vision of the relation between nature on the one side, and history on the other, which inverted the typical understanding of the relation between the two terms. Nature at its most natural became historical, while history at its most historical reverted into a kind of "second nature." Nature, typically understood as the unchanging, became the site of the new. History, supposedly the site of novelty, and epoch-making events like the French Revolution, became the realm of the always-the-same, as capitalism is able to come to grips with its own crisis tendencies. It is possible to see in the idea of natural history a new geological epoch following the Holocene, called the "Anthropocene." This acknowledges the massive impact of human activity, which already does and continues to have an impact on the earth and its transformations. This transformation of natural ecology is itself premised on a history that has been flattened and reified by capitalist social relations. As has recently been suggested by Frederic Jameson, "It is easier to imagine the end of the world"—that is, the new—"than to imagine the end of capitalism"—that is, the always-the-same.[7]

How this plays itself out concretely can be understood through the recently released IPCC report. It suggests that the first real manifestation of global climate change will be in the area of water and food security, which will of course hit the poorest nations first. I was talking to Tarek Shalaby about Egypt, where we see tremendous sensitivity by the Egyptian people to the grinding poverty that afflicts their everyday life. Reductions, for example, in bread, oil, and fuel subsidies, played a key role in political mobilization in the run-up to the revolution in 2011. Ongoing desertification of the Nile valley brought about by global climate change will no doubt exacerbate an already precarious situation.

Given the urgency of the IPCC report, we do well to go back to Rosa Luxemburg slogan of "socialism or barbarism."[8] This does not indicate simply a transition to socialism, as the productive forces burst asunder increasingly antiquated production relations. It also contains a critique of historical progress as we see in Benjamin and Adorno, whereby the only progress that is imaginable is a shattering of the very logic of progress. The expanded development of the productive forces eventuates in a self-preservation run wild, a logic that ultimately undermines itself insofar as it fails to secure a key condition of capitalism, the reproduction not just of labor-power, but of sensuous nature itself. It is for this reason that Adorno calls for a 'second Copernican revolution', one that leads away from the primacy of the subject *qua* Kant, Hegel, and also Marx, towards the primacy of the object. Based on such assumptions, I will conclude with the following: Emancipation would entail the freedom not only of the subject, but also of the object. It would reject productivist versions of Marxism, favoring what Adorno calls a "communication" between subject and object, and a condition of peace between the two.

Joseph Schwartz: I probably will be a bit more explicitly political and policy-oriented than the previous speakers. One of the weaknesses in a lot of social theory today, particularly in its post-structuralist forms, is that we really don't think seriously about political economy. We don't use the analytic and normative tools of social theory to look at the actual dynamics of a society, both its barriers to emancipation and also its possibilities. In that spirit, I would suggest that, in a certain sense, Marxism as a theory has *always* been in crisis. I take very seriously the implicit ethical import of Marx, in the sense that anyone who is a democrat has to be against exploitation and domination in the workplace, or any intersubjective human relations. We believe there should be democratic control over the social surplus, and the labor process—as Michael Burawoy always says, "who gets what" and "who does what." The democratic vision is really that there should not be a divide in society between those who define its tasks, and those who carry them out. We do still have a very rigid division of labor in many arenas of social life, between those who set the tasks, and those who are dominated and forced to carry them out.

Marxism is an incredibly seductive social theory because it promises a theory of history, social structure, and agency that culminates in a teleological revolution. The Marxist insight—which I think is partly true, but it has never been fully fulfilled—is that because labor under capitalism is an interdependent social process, but one governed a-socially or hierarchically, democratizing that control over production would be the goal of the proletariat, as it became conscious of itself not only as a class in production (in itself), but as a conscious revolutionary class (for-itself). The only problem is that in its most powerful forms, in the types of bourgeois-democratic capitalist societies that Marx thought would give rise to revolution, to the extent to which the labor movement or the socialist movement had a mass impact up through the 60's-70's, it was much more reformist than revolutionary. I think we have to take seriously the arguments made as early as the 1920's by e.g. Selig Perlman, that in a certain sense, workers have more than their chains to lose, and therefore are often more reformist when engaged in social struggle than revolutionary. Where workers have been more revolutionary is in those countries subjected to imperial domination, and the rapid industrialization of a predominantly peasant society—say, workers in Shanghai in the 1920's, or workers in Petrograd and Moscow at the turn of the 20th century. However, these lacked the mass industrial base that Marx had said was a prerequisite for the transition to socialism.

One thing we have to deal with is that whatever Lenin or Trotsky said about the revolution, Marxist-Leninist parties have mostly governed as engines of state-led primitive accumulation. If you think this is a joke, I grew up with a mother who still thinks the Soviet Union was a great society until this guy Gorbachöv came along. She would always say that Stalinism was like American slavery: "Where are you going to get a surplus from unless you exploit people? We had to do it." That's the traditional defense: read Sartre, or Merleau-Ponty in his earlier formation. The justification for Stalinist rule was that you had to extract surplus from Kulaks, and even from workers, by starving them and working them hard. Otherwise you couldn't industrialize. The Marxist view is that the proletariat, increasingly interdependent in production, would also become increasingly consciously revolutionary in subjective activity. But the objective and the subjective dynamics of Marxism never fully met.

"Revolutionary politics and thought" continues on page 3